



Hypothermia fatalities in a temperate climate: Sydney, Australia

Author(s): Lim C, Duflou J
Year: 2008
Journal: Pathology. 40 (1): 46-51

Abstract:

AIMS: Fatal hypothermia is well known to occur in cold climates, with previous case series reflecting this. However, hypothermia can also occur in temperate climates. This case series describes the features and circumstances surrounding hypothermia-related deaths in Sydney, Australia. **METHODS:** The files of hypothermia-related deaths were reviewed at the Department of Forensic Medicine, Glebe between 1 January 2001 and 31 December 2005 via a search of electronic autopsy records. **RESULTS:** Twenty-four cases of fatal hypothermia were found. Many of the deaths occurred in winter (46%). The mean age was 76 years (range 56-92), with a female predominance (63%). Risk factors for hypothermia were identified in 58%. The mean body mass index (BMI) was 22 (range 15-33). Nineteen cases (79%) were found indoors. Four decedents were found naked, four were dressed in minimal amounts of clothing, and paradoxical undressing was found in seven cases. Pathological findings included gastric erosions (79%), and patchy reddish brown discoloration over large joints (75%). The majority of cases had significant pre-existing natural disease processes. Out of 18 cases where toxicology was performed, alcohol was detected in four cases, while other psychotropic agents were present in four deaths. No illicit drugs were detected. **CONCLUSION:** This study shows that fatal hypothermia, a significant public health problem, is not limited to cold climates. Forensic pathologists in Australia need to be aware of this condition, and not dismiss death as due to natural disease processes.

Source: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00313020701716466>

Resource Description

Exposure :

weather or climate related pathway by which climate change affects health

Temperature

Temperature: Extreme Cold

Geographic Feature:

resource focuses on specific type of geography

None or Unspecified

Geographic Location:

resource focuses on specific location

Climate Change and Human Health Literature Portal

Non-United States

Non-United States: Australasia

Health Impact: 

specification of health effect or disease related to climate change exposure

Injury

Medical Community Engagement: 

resource focus on how the medical community discusses or acts to address health impacts of climate change

A focus of content

Mitigation/Adaptation: 

mitigation or adaptation strategy is a focus of resource

Adaptation

Population of Concern: A focus of content

Population of Concern: 

populations at particular risk or vulnerability to climate change impacts

Elderly

Other Vulnerable Population: People with alcoholism

Resource Type: 

format or standard characteristic of resource

Research Article

Timescale: 

time period studied

Time Scale Unspecified

Vulnerability/Impact Assessment: 

resource focus on process of identifying, quantifying, and prioritizing vulnerabilities in a system

A focus of content